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ABSTRACT

The United States portion of a crossnational study of coping styles suggests that children may have coping strategies that support their value systems. Participants were two random samples of equal numbers of ten- and fourteen-year-olds, boys and girls, upper-middle class and upper-lower class in communities near Chicago, Illinois, and Austin, Texas. Sentence completion, occupational values, and occupational aspiration instruments were used to collect data. Results show that children with high aspirations seem to value leading others more than valuing job security. Children with high occupational aspiration tend to value getting ahead of others more than finding self-satisfaction in a job, and they do not try to get along with others, such as peers or authority figures. On the other hand, children with high educational aspirations seem to get along well with authority figures and cope effectively with task achievement situations. Thus, evidence now exists that occupational values are correlated with coping strategies that seem to actively support the values. (MEK)

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Coping Strategies, Career Aspirations, and Career Values
In The Career Decision-Making Process

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Coping Strategies, Career Aspirations, and Career Values In The Career Decision-Making Process

The relationship between coping strategies and the career decision-making (CDM) process is a new and important area of investigation. Holland (1973) sees coping strategies as personality characteristics that lead a person to choose a type of job. Crites (1976), identifies coping strategies as the repertoire of responses a person uses to achieve a choice, i.e. the process of deciding, and he requests further theoretical investigation into the role of coping strategies.

Both categorical and descriptive studies of coping strategies have been done by vocational psychologists. Description of coping strategies have been provided by Holland (1963, 1973), Kroll, et al. (1970), and Blocher (1973). Categories of coping strategies have been used in studies by Super, et al. (1967), Kroll, et al. (1970), and Harren (1979). However, exploration of the correlates of coping and the coping process has only been done by Peck (1979).

While coping strategies are new variables in the study of decision-making, two old ones are aspiration and values. The terms vocational aspiration and expressed vocational choice are often used interchangeably (Wiggins and Weslander, 1977). Currently, several studies have provided evidence that expressed vocational choice predicts a person's future employment about as well as interest inventories or combinations of personality and background characteristics (Whitney, 1969; Holland, 1971; Holland and Gottfredson, 1974). Vocational values have also been long recognized as a basis for vocational choice (Jepsen and Dilley, 1974).

Values tend to activate human motivation and channel behavior. In fact, it has been said that value judgments determine how people mobilize their resources to cope with or master their environment (Blocher, 1973).

In the model of effective behavior presented by Peck (1979), the three components of coping are attitudes and feeling, motivation, and coping strategies. Occupational values and aspirations constitute the motivational component. A major hypothesis of this theory is that these three components will influence each other in the process of a person's achieving effective behavior. The results of this study present a unique opportunity to empirically examine this relationship for the first time.

Method

The data reported here come from the cross-national study of Coping Styles and Achievement with Dr. R. F. Peck as principal investigator. The study was conjointly designed and implemented by an eight nation team, including researchers from Brazil, England, Italy, Japan, Mexico, West Germany, Yugoslavia, and the United States.

The participants in this study were two stratified, random samples of students from each of these countries with two groups in the United States. There were equal numbers of 10 and 14 year olds, boys and girls, and upper-middle class and upper-lower class. The first sample (1965, Stage I) included 6,400 children and the second sample (1968, Stage III) included 3,600 children. The data for this paper include only children from the two United States areas: communities near Chicago, Illinois, and Austin, Texas.

The instruments for this study were developed in an international conference, translated, back translated, pilot-tested, and revised until item-comparability in six languages was attained. Several instruments

were devised to measure attributes of each of the three components of effective behavior. The data in this report came from the Sentence Completion, Occupational Values, and Occupational Aspiration instruments. The Sentence Completion was a projective measure designed to elicit the children's attitudes and coping strategies in five behavioral situations: Task Achievement, Authority, Aggression, Interpersonal Relations and Anxiety. To analyze the responses of the 40 incomplete sentences, codes were developed to categorize responses to the coping stems. This instrument demonstrated satisfactory test-retest reliability scores of .75 to .80 on the five main factors and showed substantial validity in predicting achievement. The Occupational Values Inventory was composed of fifteen work values presented in a series of possible sets of paired statements, i.e. a forced choice measure. Responses were scored according to frequency of choice for each value. The test-retest reliability on the Austin sample ranged from .68 to .83 for the factors on this instrument. To measure educational and occupational aspirations, the children were asked to state the ultimate degree of education they wanted, and the future job they wanted. Both were scored on a six-point scale, with occupational choice being scored by Havighurst's occupational prestige scale. The test-retest reliability of this instrument was .89 in the Austin sample.

The Sentence Completion and Occupational Values instruments were factor analyzed separately by country, and by age group. The principal factor method was used and it was rotated by the quartimax method. The Occupational Values instrument reduced to six factors which accounted for 60-80 percent of the variance, and the Sentence Completion instrument

reduced to 10 factors. Correlations were obtained among these factors and the Aspiration scores; a criterion of .05 level of significance was used.

Results

Using multiple regression analysis, an overall finding of this study was that coping and motivation measures together showed much greater power to explain school achievement than any previous noncognitive measures. Children who have high aspiration levels also tended to exhibit high levels of school achievement.

Boys had higher aspiration levels than girls in both cities, except in Austin where girls had equal educational aspirations. Sex differences in values were found, with boys highly valuing their father's occupation and girls highly valuing altruism and not valuing success or prestige. Few sex differences existed in the coping measure.

Socioeconomic status differences did not differentiate aspiration levels, but a few occupational value differences were noted. Overall, upper-middle class children tended to value following in their father's occupation, and independence, more than upper-lower class children.

Children with high occupational aspirations tended to highly value goals of success and management, and they had little value for goals of self-satisfaction or security in a job. Children with high educational aspirations were similar as they tended to highly value work in which they could lead others, and put little value on a job with security.

Ambitious children with high occupational aspirations did not deal with authority figures, age-mates, or aggressive situations by maintaining a neutral, non-hostile, affect in these situations; in fact, they

reacted with some hostility. On the other hand, children with high educational aspirations tended to maintain a positive attitude toward authority figures. They were also likely to cope effectively with task achievement situations by confronting the problem, attempting to solve it, not asking for help from others, maintaining a positive attitude toward the task, and maintaining a neutral, non-hostile affect while performing the task.

One of four occupational value factors that correlated with coping scores was valuing of altruism and self-satisfaction in a job, while not valuing success, prestige, or economic returns from a job. This value factor is clearly an intrinsic value, and was held predominately by girls. The evidence suggests that children with this set of values tended to cope effectively with interpersonal relation situations by facing the problem, attempting to solve it, not seeking aid or advice from others, and maintaining neutral affect about the situation. They also tended to maintain a positive attitude toward authority figures. Furthermore, they were likely to cope with task achievement situations by confronting the task, attempting to solve it, not seeking aid from others, and maintaining neutral affect.

The children who valued learning about and doing many different things (intellectual stimulation and variety) and those who valued job security, indicated that they tended to cope with aggressive situations by confronting the situation, attempting to solve the issue, and not seeking help from others. However, when faced with aggression, the intellectually curious maintained a positive attitude and those who valued job security maintained a neutral, non-hostile affect. The intellectually curious also tended to cope with interpersonal relations by maintaining a positive attitude.

Finally, the children who highly valued independence, an intrinsic value, tended also to cope with aggression by facing the problem, attempting to solve it without assistance, and maintaining a neutral affect about the situation. They were likely to cope with interpersonal relations by confronting the problem and attempting to solve it, and they were likely to cope with authority figures by confronting the issue but doing nothing else to solve it. In both the interpersonal relations and authority figure situations, these people tended to have mixed attitudes and feelings toward these situations, i.e. some samples were positive and some were negative.

Discussion

From these data, children with high aspirations seem to value leading others more than worrying about job security. Children with high occupational aspiration tend to value getting ahead of others more than finding self-satisfaction in a job, and they do not try to get along with others, such as peers or authority figures. On the other hand, children with high educational aspirations seem to get along well with authority figures, and cope effectively with task achievement situations, both of which issues are inherent in educational settings.

Apparently, coping with aggression and interpersonal relations are high priority for young adolescents, because effective coping is evident in these situations in three of the four value groups. Only those with altruistic values are not concerned with aggression. Interestingly, this is the only group with intrinsic interest in doing quality work and in getting along with others, peers and authorities. On the other hand, children who value job security have only one coping skill -- dealing with

aggression. While that skill probably helps avoid competition, other skills seem to be needed to retain a job. The intellectually curious and children who value independence are not afraid of their peers or aggressive situations. Although children who value independence cope effectively with people; some of them are distrustful and others are not. In this group, ambivalence of affect was apparent with peer groups and authorities, both of which are a source of threat to a young adolescent's sense of independence.

These findings suggest that children may have coping strategies that support their value systems. Blocher (1973) and Kroll, et al. (1970), suggest that values lead to certain coping strategies. These correlational data cannot provide evidence for or against this hypothesis, but a recent study by Arroba (1978) demonstrated that decision-making coping strategies changed with the importance placed on the content of the decision process. The important point is that evidence now exists that occupational values are correlated with coping strategies that seem to actively support the values.

In regard to Harren's model of career decision-making (1979), a person's values are clearly determinants of progress in each stage of his decision-making process and especially the planning and implementing phases. Harren states that values will change as the person goes through the three parts of the implementation phase -- conformity, autonomy, and interdependence. Perhaps as values change, correlated coping strategies also change and are accented.

On the other hand, a crucial point differentiates these two theories involving coping styles. The coping process theory developed by Peck and his colleagues involves descriptions of the role of emotional aspects of decision making, a long awaited addition to a field of predominately cognitive decision-making models. In fact, "Coping behavior takes up where

cognitive decision-making leaves off. The affective side of decision-making is taken into account (Kroll, et al., 1970)." Harren's intuitive or dependent styles probably have emotional components, but they are hidden. However, the explicit contribution of emotional aspects of decision-making is apparent in Peck's model and in his empirical findings.

Implications for vocational counseling are beginning to emerge. As more is known about coping strategies, that knowledge can be used in vocational counseling where several counselors (Blocher, 1973; Campbell, 1975) have already set a goal for vocational guidance to help individuals acquire a set of work-relevant coping behaviors that enable them to engage the work world with effectiveness. Before this can be achieved, more research is needed. Many questions about the nature and development of coping strategies are unexplored. A major question is "How stable and effective are these youthful coping strategies in predicting adult career choices and career success?" Currently, a longitudinal follow-up study of the children in the Austin sample of this study is planned, to explore such questions.

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